

Mordechai LEVY

Yezreel Valley College, Yezreel Valley

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## IRAN IN THE MINDS OF THE ISRAELIS<sup>1</sup>

Iran and Israel are two main countries in the Middle East, and their behavior has considerable implications on the region and to a considerable extent on the world. The two countries are distant from one another geographically, do not have a shared border or territorial demands, did not wage wars against one another in the past, and yet nevertheless they are found in a sharp conflict, which is expressed in negative images and in reciprocal declarations about the danger of the existence of the other country. Iran has a main role in the foreign policy of the State of Israel, and the policy towards it developed from a complicated and multilayered system of images that help give meaning to Israeli society and to the decision makers about the nature and intentions of the Iranian regime. Moreover, the sudden transition in the relations of the countries, from intimate closeness until 1979 to extreme hostility after the Islamic revolution, left Israeli society without an appropriate framework of images and therefore it was necessary to create it from social and cultural bases of knowledge and to make it accessible for the decision makers. A military response or a political process, an economic boycott, or disregarding and ignoring – all these are possible ways of action in the international arena, and they are acceptable in the way in which Iran and the Iranian threat are perceived on the part of Israeli society and the political system. In other words, the way to understand the foreign policy of Israel towards Iran goes through the understanding of the world of images and through the structuring of this world in Israeli society. The goal of the article, therefore, is to present the world of images of Israeli society regarding Iran and the way in which it understands the Iranian nuclear program.

The theoretical framework at the basis of the research is the theory of social representations, which was represented by Serge Moscovici (1984). This is a social psychological theory, which is used as a tool for the understanding of social behavior and social phenomena. In this research study, it is used as a tool for the understanding of the images and their formation in Israeli society. Since Israeli society is complex and diverse, the article will begin with a general review on the composition of Israeli society and the main divisions in it. It is not possible to understand Israeli politics without understanding the complexity and pressures that exist in it. The heterogeneity in society and the different cultural mindset influence the world of images and the understanding of the political reality. In the continuation, the article describes the theory of social representations and its main ideas as a tool for the understanding of the theoretical basis of the article and the constellation of perceptions in society. The article is based on a re-

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search study conducted among Israeli students with the goal of revealing the store of images existing in Israeli society regarding the State of Israel, Iran, and the international arena. The research findings are presented at the end of the article, along with a graphical model that was built as a research tool that aids in the examination of the social phenomena, and it is even proposed for implementation also in the rest of the areas of the social sciences. At the beginning of the article, a short historical review is presented on the development of the relations between Israel and Iran over the years, so as to give the reader the appropriate historical context. We also chose to add in the article an analysis of a speech given by the Prime Minister of Israel, Binyamin Netanyahu, to illustrate the world of images of the political leadership of Israel.

### ISRAEL – IRAN RELATIONS, 1947–1979

The relations between Israel and Iran can be described as a sharp movement of a pendulum from side to side, from relations of friendship and strategic collaboration at the one end to relations of hostility and disgust on the other end. The changes in Iran's attitude towards Israel cannot be understood only in the limited framework of the relations of the countries but rather in a broader context, in the relation of Iran to the Western countries, and in an even broader context of the attitude of the Islamic world to the culture of the West. The budding rapprochement of Iran to the culture of the West can be identified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The encounter with the rich West and the realization of the impressive achievements in the fields of military and technology created the drive to change the old patterns and to adopt new ideas, a trend that is very significant in a traditional society (Menashri, 1996: 13). The Western power was attributed to the modern patterns of society in Europe, and ideas such as sovereignty of the people, individual freedom, and modern education became the goal of those who sought to bring Iran into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, after World War I the ideology that supported Westernization steadily became established, and this idea was promoted through the two Persian kings of the Pahlavi house: Reza Shah and his son Mohammed Reza Shah.

In the vote on the partition plan of the United Nations on Palestine in 1947, Iran adopted the position of the Arab countries and voted against the establishment of the Jewish state. However, a year later *de facto* diplomatic relations were established on a low level between the two countries. The next fluctuation in the relations of the countries was in 1951, when the relations were disconnected with the rise to power of Mohammed Mossadegh. Mossadegh, who led an Iranian nationalist line against the Western oil companies, saw Israel to be a colonial extension, but this policy lasted only two years till his fall. The Suez War in 1956 was a turning point in the relations between the two countries, and the pendulum again swung in the direction of close relations. The Israeli government under David Ben Gurion initiated a policy called the "Periphery Alliance". The assumption was that Israel must jump to the periphery of the Middle East, beyond the Arab countries at its borders, and establish relations with the non-Arab countries: Turkey to the north, Ethiopia to the South, and Iran to the East. The alliance was based on the foundation of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," or in other words, a shared aspiration to reduce the radical influence of the Egyptian President

Gamal Abdel Nasser and to halt the influence of the Soviet Union in the Middle East (Litvak, 2004: 368; Shlaim, 2006: 198). The new relations were based on military advice, supply of weapons, and technological assistance in the fields of agriculture, water, and medicine. For Israel, the identification with the Shah went beyond the strategic alliance; it placed Israel and Iran together in the modern Western camp, against the traditional Arab world and it provided a legitimacy for the Zionist project (Ram, 2006: 29). The relations between the countries were officially arranged at 1960, this step awakened objection on the part of Egypt, which disconnected its relations with Iran, and on the part of Muslim religious leaders, led by Ayatollah Khomeini. In that year about 150 religious leaders gathered at Al-Zahar University in Cairo and issued a *fatwa* ruling for all Muslims in the world to embark on a holy war against the Shah for his pro-Israel policy (Milani, 1998: 49). However, the pressure on the Shah from the opposition factors only pushed him more strongly into the open arms of the State of Israel. In 1963 the Shah instituted a reform policy called the "White Revolution", and the program included social, economic, and cultural development with the goal of pushing Iran to the ranks of the developed countries. The efforts of secularization, western education, and economic and agricultural reforms created opportunities for Israeli firms to enter the Iranian market but also harmed the power of the traditional elites (Menashri, 1996: 116). Parts of Iranian society saw this policy as harming the old values, and the rhetoric of the religious leaders under Ayatollah Khomeini against the Shah and against Israel only increased. The Islamic Revolution that occurred in 1979 was the natural continuation of the opposition to the Shah's regime, and most of the citizens were motivated by the belief that Islam is the solution to all the troubles of the individual and the community. The establishment of the Islamic Republic instead of the Shah's regime caused a sudden break down, and again the pendulum in the Israel-Iran relations swung to the direction of distance. The relations between the two countries were disconnected, and the State of Israel overnight became the greatest enemy of the Islamic Republic.

There are two elements at the basis of the hostility to the State of Israel. The first is the hostility to the West: Israel is identified as the emissary of the Western culture that is responsible for the great crisis of the Islamic world in the modern era (Litvak, 2004: 370). The threat is not only cultural but also strategic, since U.S.A military forces are given access near the Islamic state. The second is the religious rivalry between Judaism and Islam, a dichotomous struggle between the light and the dark. The Ayatollah Khomeini frequently quoted from the Quran verses that describe the Jews as sinners and ascribed to Judaism the intention to destroy Islam. The conquest of Islamic lands in Palestine and especially the conquest of Jerusalem, which is sacred to Islam, served to fuel the religious hostility against Israel. The rhetoric became sharper and sharper, and Israel over time was presented by the Iranian regime through anti-Semitic images, images of a "Satan" or "cancer in the body of the nation" and "enemy of humanity" (Litvak, 2008: 65). Deviation from the ideological commitment of Iran occurred during the Iran-Iraq war, when the Iranian regime suffered military distress. Iran's request for military assistance was granted by Israel, which provided to the Iranian military advanced weaponry in a deal during which the American priest Benjamin Weir, who was held by the Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, was released (Milani, 1998: 12). Israel, which feared an Iraqi-Syrian- Jordanian eastern front, had its own reasons to strengthen

the Iranians (Shlaim, 2006: 417). Moreover, there was also the strategic desire to strengthen the pro-Western reformists in Iran (Menashri, 1990: 376).

On the practical level, Iran began to promote its anti-Israeli policy through the Islamic and Palestinian resistance movements. In 1982, Hezbollah, a Shi'ite Islamic organization was established with the assistance and inspiration of Iran, in the effort to expand the Islamic revolution and to battle against Israel. The Lebanese militia receives considerable material and moral support from Iran, and in many ways, it is considered the Iranian arm against Israel and other foreigner presence in Lebanon. Even after Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, Hezbollah persevered with its activity and continued to encourage the Islamic resistance from the north border of Israel. Simultaneously, Iran is seeking to, struggle against Israel through cooperation with the Palestinians movements. The first connection was made at the beginning of the 1970s when Islamic revolutionaries were sent to P.L.O. camps in Lebanon for training. The symbolic act that expressed the stance of Iran toward the P.L.O. took place a week after the revolution, when Yasser Arafat, the head of the P.L.O. was received with great honor in Tehran and the new Palestinian embassy was founded in the place of the former Israeli embassy.

In 1993, Iran began to evince a more direct involvement in the Israeli-Arab conflict. Following the expulsion of 415 Hamas activists from Israel to Lebanon, Iran extended its patronage and began to provide aid to the Hamas organization, which opposed the peace process and what it believed to be the conciliatory policy of the Arab countries. The capture in 2002 of the *Karin A* ship, which was carrying Iranian weaponry to Gaza, illustrated to Israel the Iranian threat, which was further expressed, in a more threatening manner, when Iran's secret nuclear program was discovered that year (Ben-Meir, 2010: 67). Over the years the official rhetoric of Iran towards Israel did not change, and it serves to maintain the fervor of the revolution. The President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, went further, when he frequently attacked Israel at many opportunities and in many contexts. The denial of the Holocaust is not new on the part of the Iranian regime, and it is intended to negate the sense of victimhood on the part of the Jews and to erode the legitimate basis of the Zionist enterprise. A declarative step in the direction was undertaken in 2006, when official Iran hosted the International Conference for the Denial of the Holocaust, under the auspices of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Litvak, 2008: 50).

### **IRAN IN THE MIND OF THE ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER, BENYAMIN NETANYAHU**

The Islamic Revolution in Iran was perceived by the analysts and the Israeli public as totally incomprehensible, an irrational step that pushed Iranian society back in time (Ram, 2006: 36). The religious leadership was perceived as fanatic and dangerous, as threatening not only Israel but also the entire Western world. The hostile attitude towards Iran is one of the single topics in Israeli politics for which there are no differences between the political camps. Different prime ministers over the years have expressed aggressive positions towards Iran, and different terrorist activities in the Middle East are attributed instinctively by Israel to Iran. Since the discovery of Iran's nuclear pro-

gram, the government of Israel has exerted heavy pressure on the Western countries, Europe and the United States, to restrict its steps and to frustrate its nuclear program. Calls for boycotts and increased sanctions against Iran and even military threats are a part of Israel's efforts to stop Iran. A close study of the speech given by the Israeli Prime Minister, Benyamin Netanyahu, to the United Nations General Assembly on September 27, 2012 can teach about how the Israeli leadership perceives Iran and can reveal the cultural mindset behind this perception.

**The Self-Perception.** The State of Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people, with barely any distinction between Israeli and Jewish. This definition reflects the prevalent mood in Israeli society. The term 'Jewish' appears fifteen times in the context of the historical past of the Jewish people. In the speech, there is focus on two historical periods, which establish the legitimacy of the State of Israel. The first period is the period of the Bible. Netanyahu emphasizes in his speech the distant past of three thousand years. He notes names of exemplary figures such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua, David, who lived in the region in the past, and emphasizes that these are the roots of the Jewish people, for all those who doubt the legitimacy of the State of Israel. The second period is the Holocaust period. Eight times during his speech Netanyahu mentions the tragic past of the Jewish people, the suffering that the Jews experienced, and the constant fear of the Jewish people of a repeat Holocaust. There is no doubt that this constitutes a main motif in the perception of Israel of what happens around it. The term 'Israeli' appears eighteen times, in the modern context of the present State of Israel. Here Netanyahu emphasizes the scientific and technological achievements of the State of Israel and that it is a modern, democratic, and free country. Netanyahu divides the world into two: the modern world and the world of the Middle Ages. Israel belongs to the modern world of Europe, America, the children of the light, those who hold knowledge, life, freedom, and equality to be sacred. To summarize, the State of Israel in the eyes of the Israeli leadership is the country of the Jewish people and has historical roots, those of a nation that brought morality to humanity and today is a part of the free world that contributes to the international effort to advance humanity in the fields of human rights, science, and technology.

**The Perception of Iran.** The second half of Netanyahu's speech is dedicated to Iran. The term 'Iran' is mentioned 48 times in negative contexts. In the dichotomous division of humanity, Iran is presented as the antithesis of the State of Israel. Iran's traits are all those that Israel is not. Iran is presented as belonging to the world of dark, the era of the Middle Ages, as sanctifying death, as closed in nature, as forcefully repressing people, as sowing terror and violence throughout the Middle East and the entire world. Considerable emphasis is placed on the relation between Iran and the efforts to produce nuclear weapons. About 41 times the term "weapons/nuclear bomb" is mentioned regarding Iran and radical Islam. Netanyahu extends Iran's threat to the entire Western world, thus attempting to forge a sense of a shared fate with the modern and free countries of Europe against extreme Islam.

It should be noted that in his speech to the UN General Assembly Netanyahu illustrated the threat of the bomb in a visual manner, by holding a picture of a bomb. To conclude, Iran, according to the Israeli perception, is an extreme country, dark and dangerous, which belongs to the world of the Middle Ages. It aspires to disseminate its

dangerous ideology throughout the world, and therefore it constitutes a threat to Europe and the United States, and its aspiration to possess nuclear arms brings it closer to that goal. (Prime Minister’s Benyamin Netanyahu’s UN General Assembly Speech, n.d.).

ISRAELI SOCIETY

Israeli society is a young and colorful society. Its uniqueness derives from the large variety of subgroups it includes and from the load of tasks assigned to it in the fields of security, economy, and society. Knowing the social structure is an essential condition of the understanding of the political processes occurring in the country (Arian, 1997: 16). The different groups are differentiated by the values, ideals, and resources at their disposal. Every group has material and symbolic needs and requirements, every group aspires to achieve dominance and to shape society, and the political system is required to control and arrange the social pressures among the different groups.

In 2012 the population of Israel reached close to eight million citizens. The main criterion that divides the society into two main groups is nationality. Israeli society is composed of a majority group of Jews that constitutes about 75% of the population of the country and of a minority group of Arabs that constitutes about 20%. The social structure was created from a combination of Jewish immigration along with the Arab population who lived in Palestine before the founding of the State. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and more strongly during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were waves of immigration from Europe to the land of Israel. The Zionist movement, which developed in central and eastern Europe, was influenced by the national ideas that spread at this time, and together with the problems of anti-Semitism that rocked the Jewish communities, the idea of the return to the land of the forefathers was posited as a modern solution to the problem of the Jews. Table 1 shows the change in the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs in the land of Israel from the first years of Zionism until today.

Table 1

Population by Population Group in Israel, 1919–2013

Year	Grand total	Jews	Arabs	Others	% Jews
1919	641,000	65,000	583,000		10.00%
1939	1,501,698	445,457	1,056,241		29.70%
1949	1,173,900	1,013,900	160,000		86.40%
1969	2,919,200	2,496,400	422,700		85.50%
1989	4,559,600	3,717,100	842,500		81.50%
2009	7,552,000	5,701,900	1,535,800	314,300	75.50%
2013	7,984,000	5,999,600	1,647,200	337,800	75.10%

Source for 1919–1939: Y. Shapiro, *The Democracy in Israel* (1977), Masada, p. 195.  
Source for 1949–2013: Central Bureau of Statistics (2014), *Population by Population Group*, p. 89.

Zionism is a revolutionary movement that aspires to build a new nation, while rebelling against the old world of the exile, a new Jewish society, in a new territory, anchored



in a historical, cultural, and social basis (Eisenstadet, 2004: 14). It is possible to summarize the Zionist project in the words of Theodore Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement and the visionary of the Jewish country, *Altneuland*, new old land. Jewish society at the beginning of its path was a society of immigrants, and only those who had a strong national consciousness came to the land of Israel, since most Jews chose to go to America (Shapiro, 1977: 20). Considerable efforts were invested in the first years of the immigrant society, in the creation of a Jewish culture as a basis for the national revival. From this, the Hebrew language was revived, schools were established, and emphasis was placed on Hebrew creative works. The collective Israeli identity is composed of four elements, which are the integration of the old with the new: the Hebrew language, the connection to the land of Israel, the connection to Judaism, and a democratic and modern culture (Ya'ar, Shavit, 2001: 223). The State of Israel is the Jewish nation state; the Jewish identity is expressed in the legal announcements, in the symbols of the state, and in the strong sense of identity of the Jewish citizens of the state. The educational system invests considerable efforts in the promotion of the Jewish identity through large amounts of the studies of the Bible and history of the Jewish people. For most Israelis, there is no difference between Israeli-ness and Jewishness.

The first crack in Jewish society was revealed after the establishment of the state when the new immigrants, the Jews of Asia and Africa, encountered the immigrants of Europe who were already in the land. Originally, there were religious and cultural differences in customs and forms of prayer created in the Middle Ages, when the Jewish communities were expelled from and scattered about Europe and around the Mediterranean. The *Sephardi* Jews, speakers of Ladino, originated in Spain, while the *Ashkenazi* Jews, speakers of Yiddish, originated in Germany. The *Ashkenazi* Jews who came with the first waves of immigrations took all the economic, social, and political centers of power and led the country, led the educational system, and shaped the collective culture in different areas. Conversely, the pace of absorption and development of the immigrants from the countries of Africa and Asia was most slow in the areas of education, residence, income, and profession. In this way, overlap was created between the cultural differences and the status differences, and a sense of anger and deprivation began to grow on the part of the *Sephardi* Jews towards the establishment and the governing party, which was composed of and identified with the *Ashkenazi* Jews (Eisenstadet, 2004: 37). The economic gaps were accompanied by cultural distress. In the first years after the State of Israel was founded, it implemented a social 'melting pot', with the aim of removing the characteristics of the Diaspora of the Jews from the different regions and creating the new Jew, secular, socialist, standing on his own. For many of the *Sephardi* immigrants who came from a proud religious traditional culture, the 'melting pot' policy seemed humiliating and hurtful. The ethnic differences also were expressed in the geographic spaces of the land of Israel, since in its first years of existence Israel implemented a policy of the dispersion of the population and the populating of the periphery regions, and thus many of the *Sephardi* immigrants were directed to development towns in the Negev and the Galilee, far from the centers of the economy, culture, and politics of the country.

The ethnic divide also had political implications on the Israeli system. During the first years, the *Sephardi* voted for the political left, or in other words, for the ruling party, the socialist *Ashkenazi Mapai* party, since they attributed to it the miracle of their

return to their homeland and were dependent on the bureaucratic mechanisms it controlled. However, the sense of deprivation and alienation towards the *Ashkenazi* establishment slowly led the *Sephardi* public towards the political right, primarily to the national party *Likud*. This party employed the traditional religious symbols that were close to the hearts of the *Sephardi* public, and it supported an activist national theme that constituted a compensation for their inferiority in the stratified structure and gave them the ability of social mobility (Ya'ar, Shavit, 2001: 44). Until today, the strongest variable that explains the voting for the *Knesset* (Israeli parliament) is the ethnic variable; in other words, the *Sephardi* Jews tend to vote for the right-wing parties, primarily for the *Likud* party, while the *Ashkenazi* Jews tend to vote for the left-wing parties, primarily the Labor party (Diskin, 1991: 94; Galnoor, Blander, 2013: 549). This pattern also appears in the second generation, which maintained the party identity with the *Likud* and was one of the main factors for the political upheaval of the State of Israel in 1977, when, after thirty years of hegemonic rule of the political left under the leadership of *Mapai*, the right camp under the national party *Likud* rose to prominence.

Tabela 2

Jews by Continent of Origin

	1961	1983	2013	Percent
Origin		.	.	.
Israel	107,000	533,900	2,602,800	43%
Asia	818,300	655,900	683,400	11%
Africa		736,100	893,200	15%
Europe America	1,000,710	1,339,700	1,925,100	31%
Jews	1,926,010	3,265,600	6,104,500	100%

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (2014), Population by Population Group, p. 110.

The political revolution was not disconnected from the change that Israeli society began to experience in the 1970s. The great victory of Israel in the 1967 war and the feeling of loss in the 1973 war eroded the sense of self-confidence of Israeli society and revived the feelings of existential fear of Jewish society. If, until then, the concepts of political left and right addressed social and economic issues of socialism versus a liberal policy, then the government revolution colored the concepts of right and left with new hues of position regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict. The position of the left calls for territorial compromises with the Arab countries and the Palestinians, in contrast to the rigid militant position of the right parties (Eisenstadet, 2004: 11). Thus, in parallel to the ethnic and class divide that split Jewish society, there was the ideological divide between right and left, which only intensified the tension in Israeli society. The erosion of the socialist, secular, *Ashkenazi* hegemony of the *Mapai* party enabled new groups to express themselves politically and culturally in Israeli society, so that we see a strengthening of the religious identity and the particular identities of the different ethnic communities that struggled to preserve their cultural uniqueness and to integrate them in the constellation of the general identity of society. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Workers' Day, which was celebrated on May 1 before the political revolution, vanished,



and instead Israeli society adopted the *Mimona*, which is a cultural rite of the Jews of Morocco that denotes the end of the Passover holiday.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in the 1990s also influenced the composition of Israeli society. The fall of the Iron Curtain led to a great wave of immigration that lasted about ten years, during which approximately 906 thousand immigrants came to the State of Israel. The new immigrants were educated professionals, and most of them quickly integrated into society. Their impact was felt both in politics, through their organization in the framework of immigrant parties and representation in the *Knesset*, and in society, through their preservation of their Russian culture. Another dimension of tension was created with the Russian immigration, and it was the addition of a group of 'non-Jews' to Israeli society. This is a group with the right to immigrate to the State of Israel in the framework of the Law of Return: from the perspective of Jewish *Halacha*<sup>2</sup>, they are not Jews, since they do not meet the religious criteria, but from the national perspective the State of Israel considers them as belonging to the Jewish people because of their family closeness to Jews. Table 1 presents the reference to them in the category of 'others'. Their status as 'non-Jews' and their tendency to secularism (some of them even have a Christian lifestyle) added tension to Israeli society, primarily regarding the tense relations between the secular and the religious Jews.

The Arab citizens of Israel are a part of the Palestinian people and an inseparable part of the Arabs of the Middle East. Arab society in the State of Israel also is heterogeneous and is composed of groups that all speak Arabic but are distinct in their religious identity: Muslims, Druse, and Christians. In the religious groups, there are also secondary divisions into sub-groups: Christians are divided into Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic, Muslims include the Bedouin, who see themselves as a separate nomadic community in their culture and lifestyle, although they are Muslim Arabs, and the Circassians are Muslims but do not speak Arabic and thus do not see themselves as a part of Arab society (Neuberger, 1998: 7). The 1948 War led to great changes in the relation between Jews and Arabs; after the war in the territory of the State of Israel there remained about 156,000 Arabs, most traditional rural dwellers, disconnected from their relatives, living in a Jewish state that saw them more as a burden than as an asset. The argument between Jews and Arabs on the nature of the Israeli-Arab conflict is profound and is anchored in different narratives, different starting points, different accusations, and different solutions. The discourse of Arabs in Israel is similar to that of the Arab world, according to which Zionism is a colonial movement, a strange invader, and an aggressor who stole Palestine from the Arabs. The Jewish discourse, on its part, presents a mirror image to the Arab discourse, according to which the Arabs are to blame for the conflict, their ongoing refusal for every compromise is what created the conflict, and therefore the Arabs must bear the responsibility for their choice (Smooha, 2001: 315). It is not surprising, therefore, that in its first years the State of Israel saw the Arab minority to be a threat to the Jewish state that is found in a conflict with the Arab states surrounding it and thus acted to weaken its power and to restrict it. In the years 1948–1966, military government was imposed on the regions where Arabs lived, many

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<sup>2</sup> *Halacha* is the collective body of Jewish religious law.

limitations were set in areas of freedom of movement and purchase of lands, and selective incentives were provided to encourage internal splits in Arab society. For instance, the State of Israel implemented a different policy towards the different minority groups regarding the recruitment into Israeli military service. While the Arab population is exempt from the obligation of military service, Druse men are obligated to be drafted into the military. For the Bedouin Arabs, the policy is to allow them to volunteer to be drafted into the military, and indeed many of the members of the Druse and Bedouin communities serve in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) (Frisch, 2011: 40). In parallel to its attitude of suspicion, the State of Israel, as a democratic state, gave full citizenship and a range of civil and political rights to the Arab citizens, and they have the representation of Arab parties in the *Knesset*.

Arab society in the State of Israel copes with pressures of conflicting identity that influence its degree of integration in Israeli society and in the state of Israel. On the one hand, there is the Israeli civil identity, which includes the adoption of the symbols of the Jewish State and the identification with its Zionist goals. On the other hand, there are the circles of national religious identity as part of the Arab Palestinian space found in conflict with the State of Israel. Until 1967, the Arabs in Israel were undergoing a process of ‘Israelization’ and strengthening of their civic sense. However, the re-encounter between the Arab citizens of Israel and the Arab residents of Gaza and the West Bank following the 1967 war re-awakened the Palestinian national emotions. In Arab society, the differences between the different groups in the degree of integration in the country and in the intensities of the different identities are apparent. The Christian community is a modern and educated community, and about 60% define themselves as Israeli. The Druse community also is undergoing processes of modernization, which are expressed in a decline in the rate of natural increase, the integration of women in the workplace, and military service. In the Druse community, about 90% define themselves as Israeli. The Muslim Arab community is the largest community, the most traditional, and the weakest in social-economic terms, and only 48% define themselves as Israeli. While the percentage is lower, nevertheless nearly half of Muslim Arab society links itself to the civic identity (Smootha, 2001: 288).

Table 3

The Arab Population by Religion, 2013

Religion	Total Number	Share	% Students	Females in Labor Force	Natural Increase
Muslims	1,388,900	83%	2%	24%	2.4%
Christians	160,900	9%	20%	48%	1.6%
Druses	133,400	8%	3%	35%	1.5%

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (2014), *Population by Religion*, pp. 91–101.

SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS THEORY

The social representations theory is a theoretical framework that enables the behavior of groups in society to be analyzed and understood. The theory was developed by

Serge Moscovici in the framework of his research on the way in which the method of psychoanalysis was absorbed by society in France in the 1950s. Moscovici discovered that different groups in French society absorbed the same new knowledge in different ways. The media of the Communist Party presented psychoanalysis in an antagonistic manner and in terms of a status conflict and a foreign implant, as a tool by American psychologists (Elchereth, Doise, Reicher, 2011: 732). The Catholic Church was the second group, and it attempted to absorb the new term into the previous world of values. The parts of the theory that suited the values of the Church were absorbed and religious meanings were attributed to them, and elements that did not suit were rejected or ignored by the Church (Bauer, Gaskell, 1999: 163). In the liberal urban community, which was characterized by a weak group identity, the term was conveyed relevantly in the framework of the transfer of new and neutral scientific knowledge to the public of readers. The conclusion of Moscovici's research was that the transfer of knowledge to the public is accompanied by the transformation of knowledge; the person absorbs the information on previous knowledge bases that exist in him and through them he examines whether the new terms fit with his social world.

This array of knowledge bases existing in the person's mind is called 'social representations'. This array, through which the person understands reality and examines the environment, is a result of the social building that is created through negotiations and discourse in society. "There is a distinction between reality and our perception of it:" this fundamental assumption is at the basis of the social representations theory (Moscovici, 1984: 3). Reality is complex and complicated, and a person does not have the resources to perceive reality directly. Therefore, the person as a part of the group creates representations that simulate reality for him. The social representations are a store of cognitive knowledge that includes images, perceptions, and feelings, both verbal and visual, along with action patterns found simultaneously in the individual's mind and in the mind of the other group members. Social representations have two main roles. The first role is to allow the person to orient himself in the physical and social environment by making the unfamiliar into familiar. The social representations enable the person to understand phenomena and attribute meanings and intentions, such as what is good and what is bad, what is cause and what is effect, and thus the uncertainty lessens and the phenomena that are not understood are controlled. The second role is to enable communication in society through the creation of agreed codes for objects (Wagner et al., 1999: 95). What is agreed upon is perceived as a social fact, and what is not is perceived as unusual and not rational in society. In essence, the social representations mix in every process of social interaction; they supervise the information that we obtain and the meaning that we attempt to attribute to it. The social representations give a prepared imaginary biography for every situation, and the meaning that they give to the individual becomes its only meaning for him.

Anchoring and objectivation are the two mechanisms that are used by the group when it is required to respond towards new knowledge or an unfamiliar reality. Anchoring is a process of the absorption of something new into the existing world of knowledge (Wagner et al., 1999: 96). What was is what will be, even if the new phenomenon does not suit the existing categories, it is adjusted and is subordinated to the existing world of social representations. Objectivation is a mechanism of the creation

of a new social representation, from an existing figurative core. The transformation of something abstract into a physical tangible object gives social meaning and functioning for the created object; analysis of the name is not only the creation of an image but also the creation of traits so that they will suit the needs of society (Wagner, 2007: 76).

Social representations are a product of discourse in society, the way to confirm and understand the reality is undertaken through social interactions, and thus through the social representations it is possible to identify and define different groups in society. A social group is distinct in that, its members share joint thinking and understanding of a phenomenon. The different social thinking and the partnership in the way in which the world is seen, is what creates a basis for the uniqueness of the group (Breakwell, 1993: 3). The social representations that the person is born into give the individual a primary means of identity, reflect internalization and expectations regarding the individual's place in society, indicate the boundaries of society, and thus ensure the homogeneity of the group and prevent social change. It is possible to differentiate between two main types of social representations. The first is core representations, which are dominant hegemonic social representations, which assure conformity and stability in society (Carvalho, Andrade, 2013). The second type is periphery representations or alternative recessive representations, which are free and more flexible representations on the part of the subgroups in society. They give an alternative interpretation to the understanding of the social situation. However, sometimes in cases in which they are represented at a high frequency they can lead to a social change. The reality in which there are a number of contradicting systems of social representations simultaneously in one society is called cognitive polyphasia (Mouro, Castro, 2012: 3). This situation indicates a heterogeneous society, versus a homogeneous society in which for the most part there are only hegemonic representations.

All social behavior, and certainly every group action, relies on the shared social understanding. In other words, shared social knowledge constitutes a basis for the adoption of an action in society, since before activity it is necessary to have initial agreements between those who decide to act on the reality and on the way in which it is necessary to act. The knowledge found in the person's mind is essential to his behavior. However, the person is motivated to action only if he is aware of the knowledge found in another person's mind. Hence, there is considerable importance of communication media in society in the transfer of information and in the creation of bases of agreement. The political leadership uses mass media to create pictures of reality for the citizens and thus to control effectively the social discourse and create agreement as a basis of political activity.

## **IRAN AS SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS IN ISRAELI SOCIETY**

The foreign policy of Israel towards Iran relies on the shared understanding of the leadership and the public in Israel of the reality, and hence agreement is also built regarding the steps that should be undertaken regarding this reality. Through research of the social representations, it will be possible to identify the core representations and bases of agreement of society in Israel and to identify the existence of alternative repre-

sentations of subgroups, which exist in parallel in the society. The way to identify the social representations is through identification of the discourse in society and attention to the variety of meanings and contexts of the phenomena (Wagner et al., 1999: 98).

The present research study was conducted in the Emek Yizrael College at the beginning of 2014, and it included about 41 students aged 26 to 47 who study in the course "The Israeli Regime". The composition of the class was diverse and reflected in its distribution the structure of Israeli society: about thirty Jews, seven Arabs, and another four who defined themselves as 'other'. Every student was asked to fill out an anonymous questionnaire on the topic of the relations between Iran and Israel. At the start of the questionnaire, it was possible for every participant to define himself according to a number of circles of identity: national, political, religious, and ethnic.

## FINDINGS

The first part included closed questions, in which every student was required to note his degree of agreement on a scale of 1 to 5. The findings appear in table 4, according to the segmentation of the national identity: Jews, Arabs, and those who defined themselves as 'other' (Druse and Circassian). At first glance, it is possible to identify a number of differences between the evaluations of the national groups regarding the different topics.

1. Media. Questions regarding the topic of media were intended to identify the sources of information and the consumption patterns of the news on the part of the respondents. It appears that the Jewish students, as opposed to the Arab students, follow the news more, are more interested in politics, and have a high level of trust in the information conveyed to them through the media channels. The two groups evaluate that they have little information about Iran, especially the Arab group, where the score was lower than 2. It is possible to evaluate that the differences derive from the fact that Israeli media is perceived by the Arab public as Jewish media, which is recruited for the country, and its goals, therefore the levels of trust and consumption are low. The same is true for the political system, in which the Arab public feels that there is a very low level of influence.
2. Evaluation of Iran. Questions on the topic of Iran were intended to reveal the way Iran is perceived on the basic level through the media channels. Here, too, it is possible to identify differences between Jews and Arabs. The Jewish students evaluated that Iran is an unstable state and it constitutes a danger to the State of Israel and a danger to the world, while the Arab students evaluated with a higher score the chances of the improvement of relations in the future and saw the election of Hassan Rouhani as an opportunity for this. The different understanding of the two groups relative to the Iranian threat derives from the different cultural mindset and the different social discourse that exists in Jewish society and in Arab society.
3. The group of 'others'. This small group consisted of four students, a Muslim Circassian and a Druse Arab, who defined themselves on the national level as not belonging to either one of the two groups, Jews or Arabs. It appears that the influence of the military service and the cultivation of the unique identity of each one of the gro-

ups are expressed not only in the definition of the identity but also in the perceptions of the reality. Regarding the media and Iran, it appears that the evaluations of this group are closer to those of the Jews, although not of the same strength.

Table 4

#### Differences in Evaluations between the Israeli Groups

	Jews	Arabs	Others
Percent	73.2%	17.1%	9.8%
News tracking	3.5	2.17	3.25
Interest in politics	3.23	2.5	2.75
Trust in the media	3.04	2.17	2.75
Knowledge on Iran	2.4	1.83	2.75
Iran endangers the world	3.71	2.5	4
Iran endangers Israel	4.03	3	4
Rouhani as an opportunity	2.86	3.75	3
Future relations	2.82	3.5	3
Iran is a stable state	2.46	3.5	2.25

The second part of the questionnaire included a series of open questions aimed at revealing the associations and images regarding Iran, Israel, and the international arena. The open questions were presented in the form of a search for explanations of the reality, such as: What is this? Why is this? What is the goal? What is this for you? In this way it is possible to reveal the social knowledge and to identify the social conventions (Moscovici, 1984: 52).

The array of images is mapped visually, in the form of a pie chart, when the inner circle is the circle of the identity, while the four outer circles describe the array of the representations as they arose from the open questions. The thick line symbolizes the border between the nation groups. In this way it is possible to look at the different images of the groups and the subgroups in society.

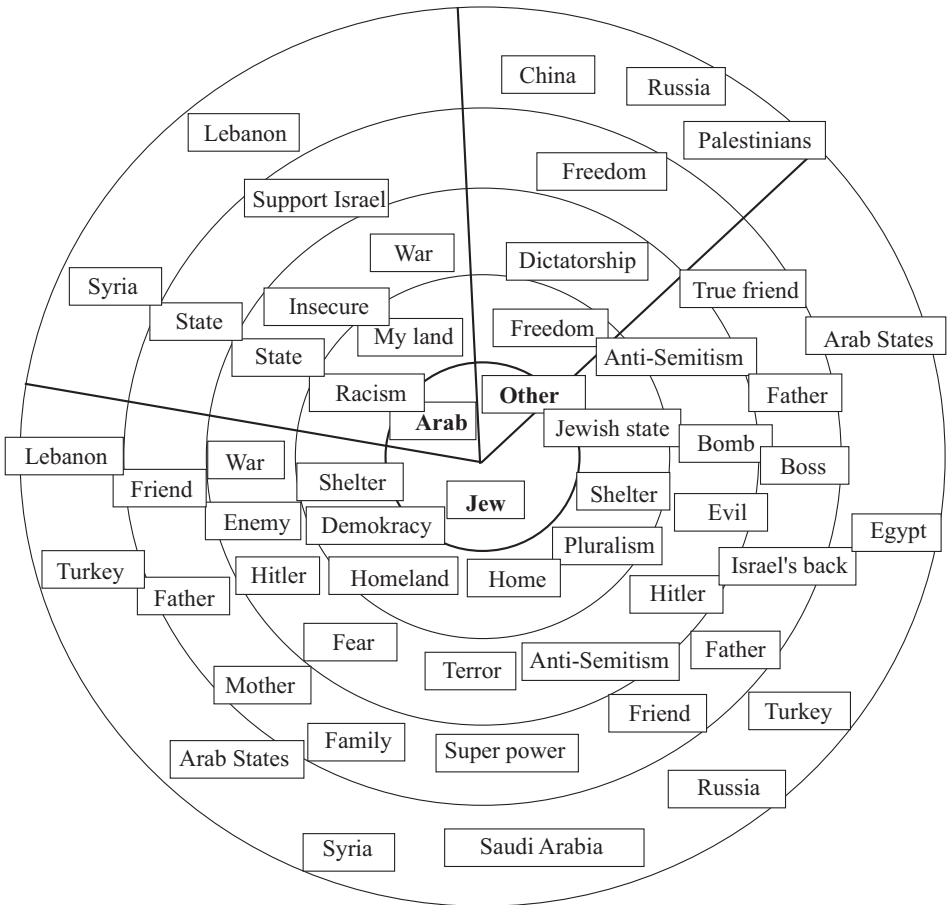
1. In the first array of images that appears in graph 1, the images were mapped in relation to the self-perception of the State of Israel and the perception of others on the part of the students. The four questions presented at the bottom, are expressed through the four rings (1–4).

- **The Jewish group.** The perceptions of the country and the perceptions of others of the Jewish group are rather homogenous, and differences were barely found according to the ethnic or political affiliation. The image of the *State of Israel* includes two recurring dominant groups of representation: the first group is cultural representations from the history of the Jewish people such as homeland, home, Jewish state, refuge, and security, and the second group is new representations related to the democratic nature of the country, such as democracy, pluralism, enlightenment, and peace. The image of *Iran* is a negative image, and it also includes two dominant groups of representations: the first groups is representations related to the Holocaust and Jewish history such as Hitler, anti-Semitism, and destruction, and the second group is representations related to the present threat such as



bomb, nuclear weapons, terror, and war. The *United States* is perceived by the Jewish group in concepts of family, in other words, close and intimate relations, such as father, mother, close friend, and family, and in addition in concepts of power and international dominance, such as boss, super-power, and manager of the world. The Jewish group identifies a number of *allies* for Iran, when the most surprising and dominant of them all is the Arab states. In addition, there are Syria and Lebanon and in the more distant circles, Russia, PRC, and Turkey.

- **The Arab group.** The representations of Israel and Iran are different in the Arab group from those in the Jewish group, and there also is difference between the subgroups of Arabs. The images of the *State of Israel* draw from the experience of the Arab minority living in the Jewish state, such as instability, racism, and my land, as well as the particular representations of belonging to the place and family



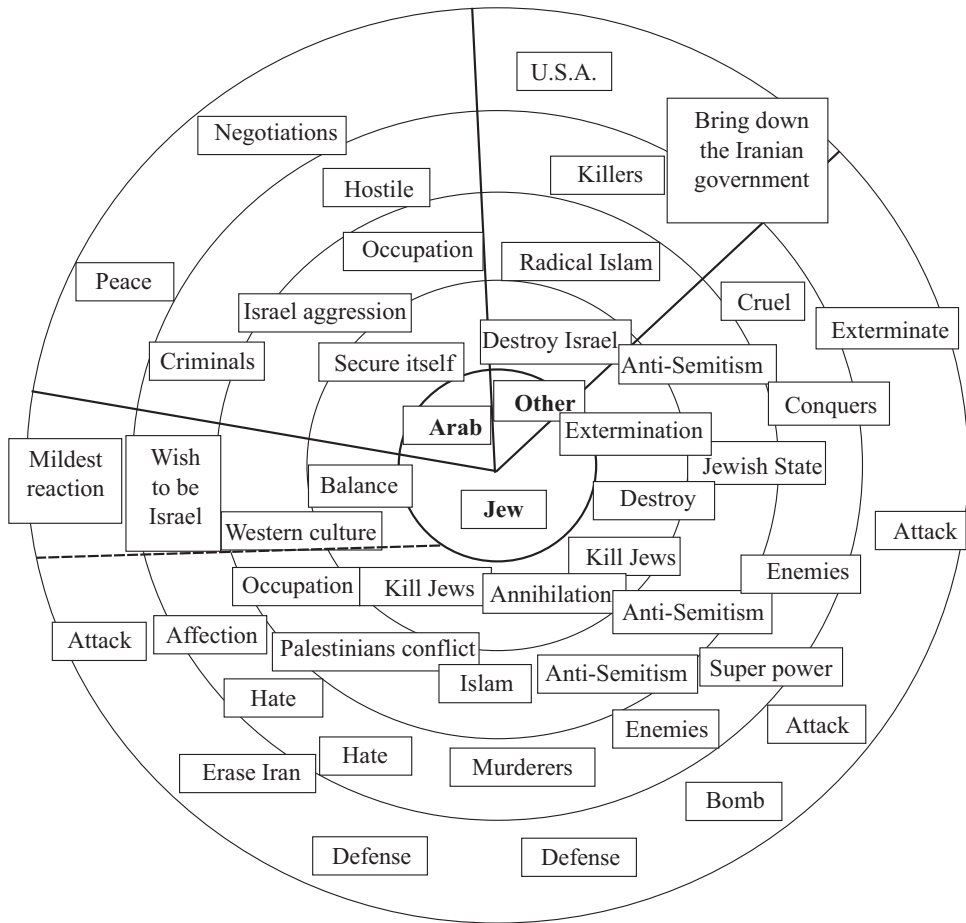
Graph 1. Schematic Map of Israel and Iran as Social Representations

1. When you think of Israel you think of...
2. When you think of Iran you think of...
3. When you think of U.S.A you think of...
4. Who do you think are the allies of Iran?

relations. *Iran* is perceived less negatively by the Arab group, neutral images of a 'country', lack of security, and fear of war. The *United States* is perceived as more distant, again by the neutral image of a 'country' or as a state that supports Israel. The *allies* of Iran according to Arab society are limited and include only Syria and Lebanon.

Although the Bedouin are a part of Arab society, their representations of the country and Iran are closer to those of the Jews. *Israel* is presented as a Jewish state and as a safe state. *Iran* is presented in the context of war, the *United States* again in the concepts of family, the 'mother of Israel', and there is no reference to Iran's allies.

- **The group of 'others'.** This group, as aforementioned, includes minorities who did not see themselves as belonging to the Arab nation. They defined themselves with the ethnic characteristic as Druse and Circassian. Like the previous findings, here too their representations are different from those of the Arabs and closer to the Jewish world of images. It appears that most of the images are a result of judgment relative to democracy. Israel is free and democratic, Iran is dictatorial and fanatic, and the United States is the land of unlimited possibilities.
2. The second array of images that appears in graph 2 describes the images relative to the explanations of the phenomena. The figure attempts to identify the explanations that society creates relative to the reality as well as the solutions required for the issue of Iran. The questions presented at the bottom of the second group are represented by the four rings around the representations of the identity. The findings that arise from the mapping demonstrate dissimilarities in the groups' understanding of the situation and the differences in the solutions required versus Iran.
- **The Jewish Group.** In the Jewish group it is possible to identify two groups according to the world of representations. The differentiating border is the political affiliation between right and left. The Jewish *Ashkenazi* group identified with the political left presents the nuclear program of Iran in political concepts of balance of power, and the explanations of the Iranian hostility are diverse and include Western culture and the desire to lead the Muslim world. Israel, according to this group, is perceived by Iran as a model of imitation, and the solution to the Iranian issue needs to be measured and considered (see: Graph 2). The rest of the Jewish group identified with the right and the political center presents historical explanations that draw from the past of the Jewish people, along with the Israeli-Arab conflict. It is possible to see that as the movement is rightwards in the *Sephardi* group, the attitudes become more radical, also regarding the desired situation. The goal of the nuclear program according to most Jews is to harm the Jews. Use is made of difficult concepts such as extermination of the Jews, destruction, killing Jews, and eliminating Jews. The reason for the hostility is presented primarily as anti-Semitism against the Jewish people, along with explanations from the Israeli-Arab conflict of the conquest of the Palestinian territories. The image of Israel according to the Iranians in the opinion of this group is hostile and includes images of enemy and hatred, along with the recognition of the military might of Israel as a strong and scary country. The way to deal with the Iranian issue is military and is presented in combative words of to attack, to bomb, to erase, to eliminate Iran.



Graph 2. Schematic Map of Iranian Hostility as Social Representations

5. What is the purpose of the Iran's nuclear plan?
6. Why is Iran hostile to Israel?
7. How do you think the Iranians see Israel?
8. What is the solution for the Iranian nuclear program?

- **The Arab Group.** The Arab group entirely, without almost any differences between the Bedouin and the Israeli Arabs, presents a world of understanding different from that of the Jewish group, regarding Iran and its intentions. Here too most of the explanations draw from the Israeli-Arab conflict. The goal of Iran's nuclear program is to become a power and to protect itself. The reason for the hostility is taken from the occupation of the Palestinian areas and the aggression of Israel. Israel, in the opinion of this group, is perceived as a criminal and as hostile to Iran. The solution to the Iranian issue is negotiations between the countries or the involvement of the United States.

- **The Group of ‘Others’.** The understanding of this group is similar to the understanding of the Jewish group, although without the emotional expressions. The

goal of the nuclear program of Iran is to develop nuclear weapons and to destroy Israel, and the reason for this hostility is a combination between Islamic religious hostility and the conquest of Arab lands. The way in which Israel is perceived by Iran is negative and hostile, and the proposed solutions are diverse and include the toppling of the Iranian government and a policy of the United States.

\* \* \*

The findings indicate that the heterogeneity in Israeli society is expressed also in the collection of images and explanations regarding the nature of the State of Israel and regarding the Iranian threat. Like the fundamental assumptions of the social representations theory, it is possible to determine that the person's understanding of the reality in which he lives relies on previous knowledge bases that were assimilated in him, or in other words, the different groups in society anchored all information that arrived in relation to Iran and assimilated it into the old world of representations.

**The Jewish Group.** In the Jewish group it is possible to identify two systems of core representations that shed light on the understanding, the interpretation, and the ways of action that are derived from them. These systems are shared by the entire Jewish society, without differences of political positions or ethnic groups, and they are implanted deep in the group knowledge base. The first system is the collection of images of the Holocaust. The tragic collective memory of the Jewish people is assimilated in such an enrooted manner in Jewish society that every threat or danger, every threatening expression, is absorbed through Holocaust images. The social image of hostility towards Israel is understood for the most part as anti-Semitism, and the goal of every threat is the destruction of the Jewish people. The fear of the existential danger is a tangible and realistic fear, and even the existence of a strong and proven military did not succeed in reducing the fear. This phenomenon was also prominent in the speech of Benyamin Netanyahu in the United Nations, when he brought up the memory of the Holocaust throughout his statements. Alon Ben-Meir in his article on Israel's response to the Iranian threat calls this characteristic the psychological nature of society in Israel (2010: 62). As aforementioned, this fear increased especially after the erosion of the self-confidence of Israeli society following the 1973 War. At a higher level, and a complementary one, another system of images was found that is also deeply based in the knowledge of Jewish society, and it is the world of social representations of the Israeli-Arab conflict. The Israeli Arab conflict is a main part in Israeli existence, and it has accompanied the Jews for nearly 120 years since the beginning of the first waves of immigration. The nature of the conflict is the struggle for the land, and it entails violent incidents that have exacted a heavy price from Jewish society. In the dichotomous division of 'we' and 'them', Israeli society is on one side and the Arab world is on the other side. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that every threat to Israel is taken in Jewish society as one supported by the Arab side. In this framework, it is possible to understand why the Arab countries and Egypt are positioned as allies of Iran, even if a strong religious and national rivalry exists between them.

Iran's declarations along with those of Islamic terror organizations regarding the need to destroy the State of Israel are perceived as an existential threat to Jewish so-

ciety, as fear against a second Holocaust, and as a part of the Israeli Arab struggle, and thus the sweeping support in Jewish society of a combative way of military attack against Iran's nuclear program. The perception of security of the State of Israel is not to enable any enemy to hold an ability that may endanger the existence of the State of Israel and that it is necessary to do everything so as not to reach this situation. This security policy has already twice been expressed in the form of military attacks against the nuclear facilities of Arab countries. The first attack was in 1981, when Israel attacked Iraq's nuclear facilities, and in 2007 Israel attacked facilities in Syria, when it feared that they were being used to develop nuclear capabilities (Ben-Meir, 2010: 67).

**The Arab Group.** In the Arab group there is no homogenous system of images and there are differences among its sub-groups. It can be said in general that the groups that receive a different attitude on the part of the State of Israel, the Bedouin and the Druse, whose sons serve in the Israeli military, create a different discourse from that of most of the Arab society. At the basis of Arab society there are internal core representations, which constitute periphery representations for all of Israeli society. The world of social representations is formed around the status of Arab society as a minority in the Jewish nation state. Every phenomenon, occurrence, or threat is absorbed and explained through this system. The State of Israel is a Jewish state, and therefore it is discriminatory and racist, the media and politics are biased in favor of the Jews, and therefore the interest is low. Israel conquered the Arab lands and denies the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, and therefore it is treated with hostility. The attitudes and declarations of Iran are a legitimate part of the struggle for the rights of the Arabs against the Jewish State of Israel, and the Iranian nuclear program is a part of the struggle for hegemony in the Middle East. Illustration of this can be found in the positions of the Arab media and the leadership of the Arab citizens of Israel during the Second Lebanon War. In 2006 Israel attacked the Hezbollah organization in South Lebanon in response to the abduction of three Israeli soldiers. During the conflict, hundreds of *Katyusha* rockets were fired at Israel, and for the first time since the establishment of the State, the Arab citizens experienced a real threat along with the Jewish citizens. Although some of the missiles hit Arab villages and although Hezbollah was in the past a bitter rival of the Palestinians, the Arab public still supported Hezbollah and assigned the responsibility for the war to Israel. The Arab *Knesset* member Talab El-Sana expressed this when he praised Iran for its support of Hezbollah. He even called the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad the leader of the Arab world, filling the place of Gamal Abdul Nasser (Frisch, 2011: 159).

About the core representations of the Arabs, there are periphery representations borrowed from the Jewish discourse. These social representations are held primarily among minority groups that are accorded special treatment and that are given the possibility of serving in the military – the Bedouin, the Druse, and the Circassians. These groups draw social boundaries in their definition of themselves as 'others'. The security burden and the blood cost created a sense of shared fate with Jewish society and the adoption of some of its narratives and perceptions as a Jewish, Zionist, democratic country that fights for its existence. The existence of these social representations in the margins of the Arab discourse can lead to social change if they are presented intensively

primarily in times of crisis, when the new reality cannot be perceived through the old social representations.

An overall look at Israeli society shows that two worlds of contradicting social representations exist in it in parallel. This reality is called cognitive polyphasia, and it reflects the existence of different knowledge bases, different experiences, and different interpretations of reality. As the knowledge bases are more distant from one another, the tensions in society rise regarding the attribution of meaning to what occurs, and thus the differences regarding what is required to be done. Regarding Iran, Jewish society sees its declarations and its activity to be an existential threat to the Jewish state, and therefore the understanding is that a military solution is needed, while Arab society sees Iran to be a force that will stand beside the Palestinians in their struggle to return their land and to achieve their rights, and the way to the resolution of the conflict is through arrangement and negotiations. However, the dynamic nature of the social representations and their existence together under one roof still preserve the ability of society to change its manner of perception of reality and thus the required ways of action.

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## ABSTRACT

The foreign policy of Israel towards Iran relies on the shared understanding of the leadership and the public in Israel of the reality, and hence agreement is also built regarding the steps that should be undertaken regarding Iran and its nuclear program. Through research of the social representations, it will be possible to identify the core images and bases of agreement of society in Israel and to identify the existence of alternative understanding of subgroups, which exist in parallel in the society. The findings indicate that the heterogeneity in Israeli society is expressed also in the collection of images and explanations regarding the nature of the State of Israel and regarding the Iranian threat. In the Jewish group it is possible to identify two systems of core representations: the first is collection of images of the Holocaust and the second is images of the Israeli-Arab conflict. In the Arab group differences among its sub-groups was found. Groups whose sons serve in the Israeli military created discourse similar to the Jewish group, and the other Arabs formed images around the status as a minority in the Jewish nation state.

## IRAN W POJMOWANIU IZRAELCZYKÓW

### STRESZCZENIE

Polityka zagraniczna Izraela wobec Iranu opiera się na założeniu, że Iran stanowi zagrożenie dla bezpieczeństwa także ze względu na program atomowy. W ramach badań nad społeczną reprezentacją w Izraelu, postrzeganie Iranu jest różne tak, jak heterogeniczne jest społeczeństwo izraelskie. W ustaleniach badawczych w grupie żydowskiej można wyróżnić dwa podstawowe czynniki wpływające na

postrzeganie zagrożenia ze strony Iranu. Są nimi doświadczenie Holocaustu oraz konfliktów arabsko-izraelskich. W grupie arabskich mieszkańców Izraela występują poważniejsze różnice w postrzeganiu Iranu. W pierwszej podgrupie, w której synowie służą w armii izraelskiej występuje dyskurs podobny do grupy żydowskiej, natomiast w drugiej wyobrażenia o Iranie uformowane zostały z perspektywy mniejszości znajdującej się w żydowskim państwie narodowym.